

# CHRISTIANITY and CRISIS

*A Christian Journal of Opinion*

## New Light in South Africa

The grievous discouragements of the South African situation are well known. Color-caste has been reinforced by the steel frame of law and state power and also considerably by quasi-religious sanctions visible at full height in the Dutch Reformed Church. In these latter years Drs. Ben Marais and B. B. Keet have led an increasing element within that church to challenge and even to reject the prevalent theological justification for *apartheid*, stripping its defence to practical arguments of national and social policy. This is a significant Christian achievement, accomplished against a powerful tide. But *apartheid* in itself has remained enshrined in many minds and hearts as sound social ethics, necessary for the conservation of values and, therefore, to be held with the fervor and tenacity of religious commitment.

Striking advance was evidenced in July at Johannesburg when Professor Keet gave the Hoernlé Memorial Lecture of the South African Institute of Race Relations on "The Ethics of *Apartheid*." It was important that the Professor of Theology at the traditional stronghold of Stellenbosch agreed to speak upon that subject before an organization which stands in the governmental and popular view for dangerous radicalism and for continuous challenge to the official ideology. An immense audience, including many prominent persons, responded with deep and generally enthusiastic concern for Dr. Keet's statement of principles which launched out from the protected arena of theology into the open field of broad humanitarian issues.

Professor Keet condemned *apartheid* for permanently subordinating the colored race as alien instruments of the dominant whites. He insisted

that color prejudice is irrational and therefore could not be moral, but must be cast out by repentance and a fundamental change of attitude. "By seeking the solution of the problem not in subjective repentance but in the objective manipulation of those who are the victims of our racial prejudice we reveal the attitude of guilty conscience which does not seek the cause of guilt in ourselves but in the proximity of those who occasion the feeling of guilt."

The argument for trusteeship is meaningful only if the guardian purposes to prepare the ward for independent, responsible life. Moreover, *apartheid* disregards the individual in the group, scorning his personality and his freedom. Here Dr. Keet classed together fascism, communism, anti-Semitism, and color prejudice, going so far as to say, "... we have developed a caste system which surpasses all others of its kind," because "here, under *apartheid*, there is no possibility of change." Moreover, he delineated the absurdity and the invocation of disaster which inhere in the current policy of forcing all persons of color into a common front against the white minority. "For the European group in South Africa in particular it is suicidal to adhere to these artificial color divisions, for it is just this approach that treats the problem as an arithmetical one. . . . Along these lines the prospects for the survival of white South Africa are indeed bleak."

Dr. Keet advocates racial cooperation, refusing to accept the false dilemma of racial domination or complete integration which the proponents of *apartheid* put forward. He expects European superiority to persist for generations, but on merit rather than on the accidental ground of color.

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"And if in the distant future the non-Europeans shall have proved their superiority and take over the leadership, the Europeans can have no grievance if they are unable with a start of 300 years to retain their advantage. By that time, in any case, one may expect that this whole antithesis of black versus white will have lost its meaning, since the cause of the antithesis will have been removed."

Thus Professor Keet employed logical analysis and social realism in his applying Christian humanitarianism to the South African scene. He dared to assault the inner citadel of color superiority, and he exposed the radical immorality of *apartheid*, declaring that policy to have "failure writ large on the very first steps taken to ensure its implementation." He calls for "the best brains, the deepest devotion and the greatest sacrifice" in the effort to achieve racial cooperation. "Right at the beginning of this task . . . the one essential condition is that a change of heart must take place, that the Europeans' approach to this greatest of all our problems must be radically altered. The road to a real change of heart may be a long one, leading through great trials and tribulations, but it must be taken at any cost and it is a road to be taken by each one of us personally. If you say that it is impossible, then there is nothing else to do but await the day of reckoning. But I have faith enough to believe that man is not so unchangeably depraved that, given the correct insight into the realities of the situation, he cannot shed his prejudices and mend his ways. That, at least, is what one would expect from a nation which is proud to be called Christian."

The American problem differs in many respects from the South African, and no casual reference from one to the other is justified. Two thoughts occur, however, in a sympathetic response to Dr. Keet's courage and vision. One is the pathos of time and the recognition from our own experience that social change of heart is a matter of decades, if not of centuries, while such periods are not always available. The other, akin to the first, is our distress that in our own states with high percentages of church membership we have not accomplished more in the development and the civic expression of decent Christian attitudes which would reduce the need for governmental protection of an important minority in "the land of the free."

M. S. B.

## THOUGHTS ON A CRUSADE

**B**ILLY GRAHAM has come and gone; the busloads of out-of-towners are back home; New York seems about the same.

What seems, however, is not necessarily what is. The work of an evangelist is by nature only partially visible and never reducible to statistics. Criticism of the results is hazardous. Surely no one should wish to "attack" Mr. Graham, who combines very great gifts and transparent piety (including gracious humility in the face of criticism) with a devotion which puts most of the rest of us to shame.

But reason remains to doubt the adequacy of the Graham crusade. Many qualified observers agree that the crusade has made next to no impact among the politely pagan multitudes of this cruel and sophisticated city. A lot of stray sheep have been returned to the fold, and many active church members have made rededications. This is certainly to the good, but it is scarcely the onslaught on Babylon which was predicted. It indicates that, contrary to the hopes of many, Billy Graham is not the answer to the desperation of New York's ailing Protestant minority.

The tendency now is to speak in terms of the great surge of new life which has come to the Protestant churches of the city through the crusade. The presumption is that this revitalization will now enable them to bear an effectual witness. But such anticipations overlook the fact that this "new life" is based on precisely that oversimplified and outmoded presentation of the gospel which was admirably suited to the culture of the American frontier, but which has proven incompetent to make real contact with the community in which the churches of New York city must live.

Mr. Graham speaks much of the "difficulty" of living the Christian life, but in the modern urban environment that difficulty has psychological and socio-cultural dimensions which (at least so far as his preaching goes) Mr. Graham has not begun to grasp. The need of New York Protestantism is for a penetrating analysis of its culture and for creative, searching, experimentation—probably on a less flamboyant scale than Madison Square Garden and Yankee Stadium—toward a genuine encounter between the city of New York and the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is doubtful that the foundation which the Graham crusade has laid is of the sort that can bear the weight of the kind of undertak-

ing to which the churches of New York are called. An injection of irrelevant zeal may, in the long run, be a more effective immunization against the moving of the Holy Spirit than was defeatist perplexity.

Despite the fact that many individuals have been led to an earnest faith through Graham's preach-

ing, it is possible that under his ministry the deepest ills of New York Protestantism have only been compounded. Ultimately, the Lord maketh even the wrath of men to praise him, but in the interim the Devil is quite capable of cementing the walls of his citadel with the mortar of honest but shortsighted piety.

ARNOLD W. HEARN

## 'The Fall' and the Faith

ROBERT McAFEE BROWN

ALBERT CAMUS' most recent book, *The Fall*,<sup>1</sup> has stirred up a considerable amount of reaction in both Christian and non-Christian quarters. Camus himself is clearly and explicitly not a Christian and not even a theist, but he is unwilling to accept an alternative which approaches nihilism or even an existentialism of the Sartre variety. His early book of essays, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, came to the conclusion that even in a meaningless universe, suicide is not permitted. His novel, *The Plague*, was a sensitive portrayal of men fulfilling the call of duty and even love, in a situation where duty and love were totally vulnerable and liable to extinction. And yet, although Camus has vigorously rejected the Christian option, it obviously continues to bother him. He continues to do battle, and the swordplay is rather vigorous for one who considers that his enemy is long since dead. We have no right to turn Camus into a kind of crypto-Christian, but we can at least see that he is dealing with many themes that concern the Christian, and that the way in which he deals with those themes should be of concern to the Christian.

*The Fall* gives us the portrait of a "modern man" who is making a kind of secular confessional, in which the reader plays the part of the listener. We hear the story of man's fall; yet as we discover toward the end this is not just the fall of a man, but in reality the fall of man. The narrator is not just telling his own story, but in a very real sense, and in a very disturbing sense, is telling us our own story.

### Why John the Baptist?

We make the acquaintance of the speaker in a small bar in Amsterdam. Since he is obviously a man of culture, we begin to wonder how he ended up in this dive. He introduces himself as Jean-

Baptiste Clamance. And here we must linger for a moment. For the book is too full of biblical allusions for us to believe that the name is chosen by Camus without deliberate intent. Why is the narrator called John the Baptist?

There are, of course, several possible ways of answering this question. John the Baptist came preaching judgment. With rather remarkable success he convicted his hearers of sin and made them aware of their involvement in the evils of their generation. Jean-Baptiste can also lay claim to considerable skill in this direction. A second possibility would be to conjecture that the biblical figure of John the Baptist is chosen as a forerunner of salvation. He pointed the way to someone yet to come, to a resolution of man's dilemma. But although this may be the most authentic meaning of the biblical figure, it is hardly descriptive of the Camus figure, for there are no more than slight and elusive hints of any kind of salvation in this novel. It seems more likely, therefore, that there is a monumental irony in Camus' giving the last word in this book to Jean-Baptiste. It is as though he were saying to us in effect, "Look, you simple-minded Christians, you live in a world where the Messiah has *not* come. This is no redeemed world. It is a world sadly in need of redemption, to be sure, but we have no grounds for hoping either that it has been redeemed or that it will be redeemed. It is a world into which a John the Baptist can come, but not a world into which a Messiah can come."

There remains, however, a very biblical prophetic thrust about Jean-Baptiste. Very early in the monologue he says, "Do you have any possessions? Some? Good. Have you shared them with the poor? No? Then you are what I call a Sadducee. If you are not familiar with the Scriptures,

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<sup>1</sup>Published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, \$3.00.



I admit that this won't help you...." (Page 9. Luke 3:11 and Matthew 3:7-8 may be of assistance to readers in this latter category.) We have possessions, yes. We have not shared them with the poor, no. We are Sadducees. Jean-Baptiste is already beginning to probe below the surface of our vanity.

Gradually we learn more about him, and discover why he needs to probe beneath his own vanity. He had been a lawyer in Paris who specialized in what he called "noble" cases; that is to say, he defended "widows and orphans, as the saying goes" (Page 17). As the saying goes, indeed. The saying goes, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). Jean-Baptiste did not take the latter part of this definition too seriously, but he was most assuredly trying to live a life of good works. His whole aim in life was to help people. He liked to give alms, to help the blind across the street, to win a case and charge no fee. He tells us, rather arrogantly, how he never bragged about these things. He was very popular. He was a social success. He was a positive thinker. This was the period in his life which he describes as being "in Eden." It was life before the fall.

### **The Devastation of Self-Awareness**

But one evening, he heard a laugh behind him. He turned around and no one was there. It seemed to him to be the laughter of judgment.

And now self-awareness begins to dawn in the life of Jean-Baptiste. He sees that he really desires to dominate other lives. He sees, worse yet, that he is a hypocrite, a play actor. "Why, shortly after the evening I told you about [i.e., the scream of laughter which began to dislodge his totally secure universe] I discovered something. When I would leave a blind man on the sidewalk to which I had conveyed him, I used to tip my hat to him. Obviously the hat tipping wasn't intended for him, since he couldn't see it. To whom was it addressed? To the public. After playing my part, I would take the bow." (Page 47.)

And so it all pours out. What is revealed in this apparently trivial incident is basic to what Jean-Baptiste really is. "I was always bursting with vanity . . . I, I, I, is the refrain of my whole life, which could be heard in everything I said" (Page 48). This kind of thing begins to strike home to the reader. Are we not also described by this candid self-revelation? What are our motives for doing good? Do we do our alms to be seen of men? Could

we ever settle for entering into our closets to pray? The New Testament is hovering in the background all the time.

Jean-Baptiste discovers something of the same thing to be true about his relations with women—and he fancied himself, not without some justification, a great lover. He saw that he really didn't mean what he said to his women. He was a spectator to his own affairs, watching them without emotion or involvement. And more devastatingly, he came to see that this was true of his intercessions for the widows and orphans. He was putting on a show there, too. The whole thing was not centered on them, but on himself.

On my own admission, I could live happily only on condition that all individuals on earth, or the greatest possible number, were turned toward me, eternally in suspense, devoid of independent life and ready to answer my call at any moment, doomed in short to sterility until the day I should deign to favor them. In short, for me to live happily, it was essential for the creatures I chose not to live at all. They must receive their life, sporadically, only at my bidding. (Page 68.)

This is a chillingly accurate description of original sin.

Jean-Baptiste is now ready to describe the event in terms of which all of this crystallized. It seems at first disappointing in its simplicity. Two or three years before he heard the laughter, something happened, the import of which finally caught up with him. He was walking home over the Seine and saw a woman leaning over the railing of the bridge. He walked on, heard the sound of a body striking the water, heard a cry repeated several times, heard an interminable silence. He wanted to run but he didn't stir. He knew he should be quick but he did nothing. Slowly he walked away. He informed no one. And for the next few days he didn't read the papers.

### **Judgment Cannot Be Dodged**

Now what happens to Jean-Baptiste after this event? More and more his self-sufficient world caves in on him. His facade of helpfulness, nobility and charity collapses. He feels himself under judgment. "*Mon cher ami*, let's not give them any pretext, no matter how small, for judging us! Otherwise, we'll be left in shreds . . . I realized this all at once the moment I had the suspicion that maybe I wasn't so admirable. From then on, I became distrustful" (Page 78).

Even his friends now seem to be laughing. They, too, have an irresistible vocation for judgment. But

it is that other laugh which continues to gnaw away at the innards of Jean-Baptiste, and he realizes that *there is laughter, there is judgment, even when there is no one to be observed laughing or judging*. From this there is no escape, as Jean-Baptiste finally realizes when he says, "The whole universe then began to laugh at me" (Page 80). This is what he tries, unsuccessfully, to dodge. Not being able to dodge it, there is the necessity of doing something with it, and Jean-Baptiste realizes that he must confess his lies about himself, confess to someone (not to God, since God is out of date), before he dies and death makes the lies definitive.

This was a kind of decision of desperation, reached only after he had sought to escape judgment in debauchery and discovered that he was condemned to the "little-ease." The "little-ease" was an ingenious medieval torture chamber. It was nothing but a prison cell too small to stand in upright and too narrow to lie down in at full length. People were left there for years, learning more and more that they were guilty and that "innocence consists in stretching joyously" (Page 110). Jean-Baptiste could not stretch joyously. But neither, he decided, could anybody else: "We cannot assert the innocence of anyone, whereas we can state with certainty the guilt of all. Every man testifies to the crime of all the others—that is my faith and my hope" (Page 110).

His own awareness of his predicament is heightened by his attempt to shrug off his guilt through debauchery. Thinking he is finally cured, he goes on a sea voyage, but off in the distance he sees a speck and thinks it is a drowning person; the cry ringing over the Seine many years before is still ringing in his ears. He cannot escape it. He will hear it everywhere, "everywhere, in short, where lies the bitter water of my baptism." He continues this figure by crying out that he can never escape from "this immense holy-water font." Here is a John the Baptist who has not received for himself the spiritual healing of baptism; he may have descended into the tomb, but he has not risen from it.

He is not too worried about a Last Judgment, because he has known something worse, the judgment of men. "I'll tell you a big secret, *mon cher*. Don't wait for the Last Judgment. It takes place every day" (Page 111). This judgment is the most terrifying of all, for with it there are no extenuating circumstances. Men now judge in the name of Christ, even though he spoke softly to the adulteress and said, "Neither do I condemn thee." But men, on their part, condemn without absolving.

### The "Judge-Penitent"

Is there a way out of this impasse? Is this terrifying sense of daily and unremitting judgment to be the last word? Jean-Baptiste claims to have found a way out. There is only one way to silence that midnight cry of laughter and judgment. "It is essential to begin by extending the condemnation to all, without distinction, in order to thin it out at the start" (Page 131). There must, in other words, be no excuses for anyone. There must be no acknowledgment of the good intention, the extenuating circumstance. Everything must be totted up. "I am for any theory that refuses to grant man innocence and for any practice that treats him as guilty" (Page 131-2).

To Jean-Baptiste, this means becoming what he calls a "judge-penitent." He closes his law office, comes to Amsterdam, and decides to indulge in public confession at every opportunity. This is not so much to secure his own innocence as to implicate his hearer in guilt. We discover that this is actually what he has been doing from the very first page. When he has finished painting his portrait of Jean-Baptiste, he not only says, "I show it with great sorrow: 'This, alas is what I am!'" The prosecutor's charge is finished." He also says, "But at the same time the portrait I hold out to my contemporaries becomes a mirror."

This is the shattering climax of the book. For we discover that this is in fact precisely what Jean-Baptiste has done:

I stand before all humanity recapitulating my shames without losing sight of the effect I am producing, and saying, "I was the lowest of the low." Then imperceptibly I pass from the "I" to the "we." When I get to "This is what we are," the trick has been played and I can tell them off. I am like them, to be sure; we are in the soup together. (Page 140.)

The judgment has indeed been "thinned out to include all." We have been brought ourselves into the circle of the guilty. Not only does Jean-Baptiste claim the right to judge us, but he provokes us into judging ourselves. We have known him less than a week, and we are not yet ready to accept his offer that we confess our sins to him, but he has upset us: "Admit, however," he says, "that today you feel less pleased with yourself than you felt five days ago?"

In the final pages Jean-Baptiste suggests, a little wistfully, that his solution is not *quite* foolproof: "At long intervals, on a really beautiful night, I occasionally hear a distant laugh and again I doubt. But quickly I crush everything, people

and things, under the weight of my own infirmity, and at once I perk up." So there is still a chink in his armor. He has not totally resolved his problem, although he thinks he has gotten it under control.

### Hearing and Listening

What does the Christian say about such a novel? That it has many Christian overtones cannot be denied, even in the attempt to avoid reading into Camus' works things he clearly does not intend. The author himself has said in a newspaper interview that the theme of the novel centers around the wish, "If only for one minute we could forget ourselves for someone else." Jean-Baptiste is clearly a man to whom the gospel could speak if the gospel could only get a hearing. He is not a man who needs to be made aware of sin, for he is very much aware of it. He knows all about judgment, and he even knows something about what is necessary on his side in dealing with judgment, which is to confess. (This is a step above most novels dealing with

judgment.) He acknowledges his need. He sees his solidarity in evil with all men, and all men's solidarity in evil with him.

But since God is now "out of style," there is no more for it than that. He is the man within hearing distance who will not listen. But it is just possible that he may be closer to a state of grace than are many conventional Christians—those who are listening all the time, but whose inner state is such that they are not actually within hearing distance. Jean-Baptiste is living in a world into which Christ has not come—to him. But if we believe that this is a world into which Christ has come, we need not totally despair of Jean-Baptiste. As long as he remains unsatisfied with himself as he is, as long as he still, occasionally, on beautiful nights, hears the laughter of judgment, however softly, it is possible that he may one time hear something else beside the laughter of judgment, the even softer, but more penetrating laughter of joy, which says, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more."

## The Oberlin Conference

The Oberlin Conference (Sept. 3-10) was the first Faith and Order study conference on the North American scene. While it is too early to assess its ultimate significance in the growing succession of ecumenical conferences, the eight-day meeting sponsored by the United States Conference for the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, and the Canadian Council of Churches was certainly an auspicious event.

A widely representative group of nearly 500 conferees, including theological professors, denominational and councils of churches executives, pastors, laymen and consultants assembled to clarify the conference theme, "The Nature of the Unity We Seek."

The participants explored this main theme through morning and evening worship, Bible study, study groups, reports, informal conversations and evening public addresses. To many observers the evening addresses by Robert Calhoun, Albert Outler, Walter G. Muelder and Joseph Sittler were extraordinarily profound and challenging theological discussions, marking the intellectual and inspirational highpoints of the conference.

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### ROBERT LEE

The conferees were organized into twelve study sections in three major divisions: Division I on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek in Faithfulness to the Eternal Gospel" considered such areas as imperatives and motivations, doctrinal consensus and conflict, baptism into Christ, and the table of the Lord. Division II on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek in Terms of Organizational Structures" dealt with the life of the congregation, the work of state and local councils, authority and freedom in church government, and the variations in denominational polities. Division III on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek in View of Cultural Pressures" had sections concerned with the mobility of population, governmental policies and programs, forces at work on the college campus, and racial and economic stratification.

This report does not attempt to summarize the voluminous reports or to present the conference findings. Those interested in such a discussion should consult the documents containing the official proceedings to be published in January 1958. In this article we focus on three observations.

### Considering Cultural Pressures

It is significant that the first Faith and Order Conference held on American soil should include, as one of its three divisions of study, a considera-



tion of the socio-cultural pressures in the making and unmaking of unity. This novelty is perhaps an adaptive response which faith and order discussions take as they are transplanted to the American scene, where religious diversity has been so much a product of socio-cultural heterogeneity. At a deeper level, however, consideration of cultural pressures in a faith and order conference points to the recognition that responsible theological discussion cannot be carried on without regard for the impingements of society on faith and order. Nevertheless, there are those who contend that discussions about cultural processes have no legitimate place on the agenda of a "faith and order" conference but belong rather to discussions in the province of "life and work".

The conference planners are to be congratulated for not following this rigid and artificial distinction. That there is no theological justification for divorcing faith and order from life and work was compellingly argued by Dean Walter Muelder in a brilliant evening address on the role of institutionalism in relation to unity and disunity. Cultural factors cannot be dismissed as "non-theological factors." Such a notion is to mistake the scope and character of theology. The way churches express their faith and order their lives cannot be adequately viewed apart from the consideration of their cultural context, and the life of the churches and their involvement in society must be informed by theological considerations. It is clear that at Oberlin the concern with cultural factors assumed its rightful place in faith and order discussions. This promising beginning should prove mutually beneficial and challenging to both the theological and sociological disciplines. It should encourage theologians to concern themselves more seriously with culture and sociologists to become more theologically alert.

The desire to go beyond the admittedly preliminary considerations of cultural pressures was manifest in the lively discussions following the divisional report. The need was also evident at Oberlin for more definitive studies and for bringing to bear more rigorous tools of analysis and interpretation. The limitations imposed by program necessities confined the discussion of cultural pressures to population mobility, higher education, government, race and class stratification. It left out of consideration such important units of culture as mass communication, leisure, the arts, and the value orientations of American society. Many delegates expressed the hope for further explorations along the lines so well begun.

### Local Forms of Ecumenicity

The status of local councils of churches, on the one hand, and federated or community churches, on the other, was widely recognized at Oberlin as an expression of unity. If the nature of the unity we seek must, among other things, "be operative and identifiable on the local level," then councils of churches are forms of visible unity. The Oberlin Conference gave significant articulation to the idea that "unity may express itself in various types of cooperation." A *de facto* recognition of these patterns of cooperation as legitimate forms of ecumenicity was evident. While some deprecate these organized structures of cooperative Christianity and regard them as inferior forms of ecumenicity, no one can deny that they perform vital functions which are necessary—given the diversity of Protestant church groups, on the one hand, and the purpose and mission of the church in confronting its community, on the other.

In addition, councils of churches are frequently the only means by which ecumenical conversation is kept alive on the local level. The rapid growth and expansion of these councils probably represent the emergence of an indigenous form of American ecumenicity. Its future development may decisively shape the nature of the unity we seek.

The conference also recognized, albeit with greater reluctance, the development of federated or community churches as responses to a need for a corporate witness at the local level. When one prominent churchman suggested that federated churches are "ecclesiastical monstrosities" from an administrative point of view, he was gently but firmly rebuked. Hesitation to recognize these types of churches springs, in no small measure, from the fact that they challenge and threaten the existing patterns of denominationalism. In addition, some denominations with a fairly precise doctrine of the church question the theological adequacy of community type churches.

Again, it is not altogether surprising that these various local expressions of ecumenicity are accorded a more significant role in a North American faith and order conference. For they reflect more recent developments on the American scene.

This recognition of local forms of ecumenicity may indicate repentance on the part of those whose conception of the ecumenical movement is confined to the World Council of Churches. It is important that these local forms of ecumenicity be discussed in the context of faith and order. The conference ought to be a challenge to the conciliar movement and to the community church movement to face

seriously the deeper levels of unity and the more sensitive matters of faith and order.

### "Art of Ecumenical Conversation"

At Oberlin there was an amazing degree of consensus and agreement. With the notable (and now characteristic) exception of the Orthodox group, there seem to be few manifest divergencies. When such widespread common sentiments prevail among such diverse groups — including unofficial Roman Catholic observers and fundamentalist representatives—then it is appropriate to remember the Lord's injunction, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you!"

No doubt the consensus in viewpoints is partially rooted in a methodological approach which seeks out and celebrates the areas of common agreement and unconsciously avoids points of differences. Another aspect of this methodology is the cultivation of the "art of ecumenical conversation." This involves a very careful way of saying and doing things—a search for the "solicitous" word to express an idea.

Conversation takes place in an eloquent and highly polished, if not always relevant, fashion so as to blunt the sharp edges of differences. Words and their nuances of meaning take on a grave importance in ecumenical discourse. If this rule is not observed, as when one plenary session reporter inadvertently used the word "insignificant" instead of "relatively less important" or "not of decisive importance" to refer to the various forms of baptism, he found the Baptist and the Orthodox joined in a "holy alliance" and voicing strong objection. Differing opinions are frequently conveyed by means of rhetorical questions or by phrasing such opinions in the form of queries.

There was the emergence of what might be called "ecumenese," a way of speaking and a vocabulary peculiar to the ecumenical movement. Such terms as "encounter," "koinonia," "mission," "givenness of unity," "unity in Christ" have a certain vogue. The content of these terms is not always explicit and their meaning frequently unclear. The idioms of this "ecumenese" find their source in biblical theology and hermeneutics. Words which are controversial in current theological discussion or words

which are associated with a particular theologian or theological school of thought tend to be avoided.

The search for a mode of expression, a language which is not the peculiar possession of one individual or one nation may be a fruitful contribution of the ecumenical movement, as it makes possible a new universe of discourse which is derived from biblical rather than confessional lines. However, there is the danger that a healthy facing of real differences is avoided and issues become obscured by such "ecumenese." There is also the further danger that those who do not cultivate this art of ecumenical conversation become less able to participate in the discussions.

Another dimension of ecumenical conversation is the valuable process of regional study groups. For two years preceding the Oberlin meeting sixteen study groups have been conducting conversations across confessional lines. These small groups of concerned Christians in such locales as Pittsburgh, Boston, Minneapolis, Durham, Toronto and Los Angeles were engaged in studying the many facets of the conference theme. Each study group prepared an orientation paper which was shared at Oberlin. In many instances the orientation paper represented a level of insight and analysis that could not be reached in the more hurried and sometimes superficial discussions at Oberlin.

Many who participated in these regional study groups testified to their value in promoting catholicity of outlook and channels for ecumenical conversation. If faith and order can continue to stimulate such conversations, North American Christians may yet glimpse more clearly the nature of the unity we seek, in addition to the nature of that measure of unity we already possess.

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